

Meeting Summary
Rio Hondo Watershed Management Plan
Project Advisory Committee Meeting #1
May 7, 2003

MEETING PURPOSE AND OPENING REMARKS

- The purpose of this first meeting of the Project Advisory Committee was to provide an overview of the project followed by a discussion among Committee members to identify issues and opportunities that should be addressed by the Plan.
- The meeting was attended by 24 individuals, including representatives from 12 cities located in the Rio Hondo Watershed, other state and local public agencies, as well as private and non-profit organizations.
- The meeting was facilitated by Daniel Iacofano of Moore Iacofano Goltsman (MIG), Inc., the consulting firm contracted by the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments (SGVCOG) to manage the development of the Plan. Other members of the MIG Team include Phillip Williams & Associates, and the Chambers Group, Inc.
- Following introductions among all those in attendance, Belinda Faustinos, Executive Officer of the Rivers and Mountains Conservancy (RMC), began the meeting with a brief presentation explaining that the RMC is the primary partner with the SGVCOG in overseeing the development of the Rio Hondo Watershed Management Plan. Among the points she made:
 - It is important to develop a comprehensive plan for the Rio Hondo so it meets multiple needs
 - This will require a collaborative and strategic effort that is both realistic and visionary over the long term.
 - This can be done by balancing the many interests sitting around this table. Your participation will be needed to create a balanced plan.
 - This Plan will help provide cities with the best possible way to deal with water quality.
 - The Plan will help activate funding for projects that might not otherwise be available.
- Mr. Iacofano then provided an overview of the project. This included a review of project goals, the workplan, timeline, other background information, and the role of the Project Advisory Committee. (see attached copy of Power Point presentation). Additional points included:
 - The importance of integrating multiple objectives in the Plan; that more can be accomplished by pursuing several interests rather one at the expense of others.
 - It was also emphasized that this will be a 4-dimensional planning effort; i.e. a plan with time in mind. In the short term, there are limits to what can realistically be achieved, but incremental changes in the right direction over a long time frame can add up to significant positive impacts.
 - The Plan will fill some information gaps with new data but given a limited grant and scope the Plan will also identify what we do not yet know and provide suggestions on how to get it

PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

The following is a summary of comments made by meeting participants, organized by topic.

Desired Outcomes

- It will be important to improve recreational opportunities along the Rio Hondo by enhancing existing resources, including parks and trails. Such enhancements can also be designed to take into account water conservation.
 - Would like to see a trail connection from Peck Park to the San Gabriel River, and much better access to nearby communities. A 15-mile trail loop can be created with a connection to the San Gabriel River. Essentially, taking steps that tie together all these recreational resources for the benefit of nearby communities.
- A much greener corridor is envisioned for the Rio Hondo
 - Greening the river can detract from flood control unless you expand capacity to compensate for the greening.
 - Does an enhanced greenway include the river channel itself? – No.
 - I have never been told how you can restore a stream that has homes right next to the river.
- Sustainability has to be a part of the Plan. It needs to take into account not just upfront capital costs but also ongoing maintenance and operational costs. It takes a lot of dollars to maintain natural areas so they still look natural. Many parks look like parks because they are relatively easy to maintain vs. more natural parks like the Long Beach natural area where people are not allowed to walk. So, whatever we plan on doing it needs to be practical, implementable, and fundable.
 - A good plan can attract the funds needed to implement and sustain the plan over time. For instance, the LA River Master Plan has succeeded in attracting \$100 million to fund projects
- Groundwater recharge – we need to make sure no pollutants enter the groundwater. . There are creative approaches for accomplishing this vs. the way things have been done in the past. For instance, permeable parking lots such as the auto lots in Cerritos along the San Gabriel River.
- Education should be an important outcome of the Plan. To promote public awareness about clean water so people don't throw out trash or other activities that impact water quality. Also, local cities and other stakeholders need to take ownership of the river.
- The Federal government needs to be involved in the education process. National primetime TV campaigns are what is required to change people's behavior. Local ground up messages simply do not reach people.
- Jurisdictional responsibilities need to be identified in the document
- Land use, zoning changes, and development standards should be addressed as part of the Plan. City requirements for new driveways now still require concrete. We are still doing things the wrong way.

Water Quality

- How do the pollutants (listed in the project overview handout) impair the beneficial uses of the Rio Hondo? The Regional Board has not drawn a connection between these pollutants and the beneficial uses of the river. First, identify the problem and then document whether there is a connection with these “pollutants.” It will be important to ask the Regional Board why they have designated these pollutants as such.
- Water quality and TMDLs- most local city public works departments are now taking major fiscal hits. So, it will be important to determine how to treat water quality cost-effectively. Suggested the need to collaborate on Best Management Practices
- It will be more cost effective to handle TMDL’s regionally rather than city by city. So, will the Plan focus on regional or local solutions?
- How we handle water quality TMDLs is a major concern.
- Where is this document headed? Will it focus on regional solutions vs. solutions required of municipal jurisdictions. Cities are now being driven by stormwater permit requirements that are not cost effective. The document should apprise the Regional Board of regional solutions. The law as it now stands will require within 10 years that all water be cleaner than drinking water before it enters the stormwater system. We need the Regional Board to allow more flexibility or all our resources will be consumed by this.

Context Questions/Issues

- What is the definition of a river vs. a flood control channel? The answer to that question might change the degree of oversight and regulation. The Federal definition of a river is a navigable waterway that can carry commerce. However, none of our local rivers meet that definition. We need cost-effective solutions.
 - These solutions need to be integrated into your capital improvement programs. A positive outcome requires that all players be at the table developing cost-effective solutions.
- How does this interface with other similar efforts in the San Gabriel Watershed and the LA River?
 - The RMC will play a large role in coordinating these respective sub-watershed efforts.
- How is the Rio Hondo watershed distinct from the San Gabriel River Watershed or the LA River Watershed?
 - The Rio Hondo is a subwatershed of the LA River.
 - In past years, during flood events, these watersheds mixed together, but they are separate, connected systems
 - Political boundaries are not aligned with watershed boundaries.
 - Local cities could be confused by what they perceive as similar competing efforts.
 - Need maps and exhibits to clarify the distinctions between these watersheds and various planning efforts

Stakeholder Participation Process

- Since the Regional Board is the agency imposing these regulations it will be important for them to also be at this table.
 - The Regional Board is a member of the Planning Team for this project and are going to be regular participants in these meetings.
- To what extent will cities from the Gateway COG be involved in this process?
 - They will be involved to the same extent as the SGVCOG cities. Four of the six Gateway COG cities invited to today's meeting are here today.
- I am disconcerted that I did not know about this project during its incubation stage.
 - The invitation letter had to be sent to the top of each organization invited to participate and in some instances it took time to circulate to the right person within each organization.
- The San Gabriel Water Quality Control Board has not yet designated a representative but they have been invited.
- Both COGs will make sure this is an inclusive process
- Have any Federal or State elected officials been invited to participate in this process?
- Will Plan document just go to the Project Director or to the full PAC? I want to make sure that we have not missed anything here.

Other Comments

- The Sun Valley Watershed Management Plan integrates water quality, recreation, and flood control. Uses wetlands in quarry for water quality treatment and as a means for holding stormwater, and habitat enhancement.
- Coordinated, collaborative efforts are needed for river restoration efforts, with especially high standards for projects along the river. A document being developed for the Upper San Gabriel River Watershed will have guidelines and tools for the right way to do these things.
- Although this is a balanced process that is focused on developing a watershed plan for the long term it is ok to also address short term projects
- To what extent does this project entail property acquisition? – There is no way to know at this time.

Potential Opportunities

- Whittier Narrows/Lario Creek TMDLs
- The Plan should include an inventory of all possibilities – the greatest opportunities or leverage points – for achieving the objectives of the Plan.
- There is a Watershed Council video (Ann Riley) on urban stream restoration that may be applicable to this study.
- Since the watershed is much more than just the corridor along the river, you may be surprised at the number of potential opportunities.
- In Downey, we saw only one slim possibility applicable to our city among the many methods presented in that video. Many seemed designed only to address 5-year floods and would be washed out by larger 25-year events.
- We should definitely refer to the State BMP manual so we don't reinvent the wheel

- What is the lead agency responsible for CEQA clearance? –RMC.

Water Quality Sampling

- All water purveyors already do water quality monitoring. We should talk with them so to avoid unnecessary re-testing. We need to use existing water quality data.
- Regional Board may not have all data.
- It is important to get tributary data.
- Monrovia Canyon on 303(d) list for lead. It takes only one sample to get on the list, but then 12 clean samples are required to get off the list.
- Department of Health Services may also have water quality data that would be useful
- Asked for volunteer help from city and other stakeholder representatives to assist with water quality monitoring effort –a water quality subcommittee. Those who responded at this time:
 - John Alderson, City of San Marino
 - Gerry Greene, City of Downey
 - Bruce Inman, City of Sierra Madre
- Water quality monitoring will be a topic for discussion at the next meeting

The next PAC meeting is scheduled for July 2.